

IDAHO SPOKESMAN REVIEW

Saturday

Riverbend Academy students build a Hummer

Twenty-four students worked together on the 'adorable' reverse-engineered mini vehicle

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Not many vehicles outsize the Hummer, but the reverse-engineered Hummer built by students from Riverbend Professional Technical Academy turns the hierarchy of automobiles upside down.

As students drove the mini Hummer down Riverbend Avenue in Post Falls on June 3, drivers sharing the road looked puzzled. The Hummer looked authentic enough, but the students driving the contraption sat higher than the body of the vehicle.

"Isn't that just adorable!" Jennifer Smithson-Weeks said as the students turned into the parking lot of River City Yamaha and parked in front of a crowd of more than a dozen parents and relatives. Adorable's not a word Hummer would use in its commercials.

Smithson-Weeks and her husband, Gary Weeks, came to the Yamaha dealership for the unveiling of the mini Hummer. Their granddaughter, Jennifer Smithson, was one of 24 students from Riverbend who worked on the project.

Students in the Computer Aided Drafting, Computer Aided Machining and Robotics class were inspired to build a mini Hummer by the automaker's "The Big Race" commercial. In the commercial, a boy builds a soapbox Hummer. As he lines up for the soapbox derby, other children snicker at the hulking Hummer.

The boy has the last laugh. While the svelte soapbox cars created by others are confined to the roadway, the boy's Hummer is able to take an off-road shortcut and win the race.

Students took pictures and measurements from an actual Hummer, designed plans on a computer and built a mostly wood, scaled-down version of the SUV. River City Yamaha provided an ATV for students to build the Hummer on.

Jennifer, a Lakeland High senior, said the project was intense.

"It took a lot getting it scaled down," Jennifer said. "That was probably the hard part, getting it so small."

She said the students' version of the Hummer is about half the size of the original.

Jennifer enrolled in the class at Riverbend because she had room in her schedule for an elective. Now she's considering a career in computer-aided design.

Cory Griffard, a Coeur d'Alene High junior, said drawing the design on the computer was a challenge.

"I had the top view," Griffard said. "It was pretty hard."

Lakeland's Matt Shipp said students were putting finishing touches on their Hummer the same morning of the reveal. They spray-painted the grill and finished the black, plastic PVC pipe bumper.

That afternoon, students planned to take the Hummer to the George Gee dealership in Liberty Lake and run it on the obstacle course created for life-size Hummers.

Teacher Bern Gannon said students have built autonomous underwater vehicles for the past four years. This year, he said, they lost their engineering sponsor and had to come up with an alternative project.

Gannon said he's so happy with the Hummer project that it may become an annual exercise. The Hummer may be displayed at business sponsors, including River City Yamaha, George Gee and Ace Hardware in Post Falls.